DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 162 953 SO 011 354

TITLE You, Too. The Social Science Newsletter for Secondary Teachers. Vol. VIII, Number 2, October-November 1978.
INSTITUTION Educational Research Council of America, Cleveland, Ohio.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 11p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; *Course Content; Curriculum Design; Educational Change; *Educational History; Educational Objectives; Educational Problems; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Relevance (Education); Social Change; *Social Studies; Student Centered Curriculum; Teacher Education; Textbook Preparation; *Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

This newsletter explores trends in social studies education from the 1950s through the 1970s. The decades of the 1950s and 1960s are characterized as kaleidoscopes of pedagogic fashions. Among the trends in social studies objectives, methods, and content were socialization, democratic attitudes, conceptual learning, inquiry learning, values clarification, racial equality, integration, cultural pluralism, ethnic studies, legal education, consumer education, and global education. Social studies courses became the target of special interest groups during this period. During the 1970s emphasis was placed on citizenship, "back to basics," and minimum competency. Among the possible reasons for this rapid succession of experiments and changes are: (1) transition in American society and world affairs, (2) teacher educators' attempts to initiate educational fashions, (3) teachers' tendencies to follow fads in search of the ultimate educational method, (4) competition of commercial textbook publishers who emphasize easy sales instead of quality, (5) lack of sequenced instructional material covering the first eight or nine years of school, and (6) textbook revisions based on fads in order to ensure consistent selection by state textbook adoption committees. The author concludes that educators can overcome social studies fads by insisting on quality textbooks, student-centered teaching approaches, and consistent and cumulative instructional materials. (AV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Vol. VIII, Number 2 October-November 1978

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

you, too

NOV 27 1978

The Social Science Newsletter for Secondary Teachers,
distributed by the Educational Research Council of America,
Rockefeller Building, Cleveland, Ohio 44113, (216) 696-8222

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Raymond English
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

ED162953

FADS AND FASHIONS IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

I. Fashions of Two Decades

Teaching social studies, or social science, is a difficult task in a world where changes—social, political, economic, and even ethical changes—are as disturbing and as frequent as they have been in our time. To keep up with events the teacher needs to travel at a speed of about Mach I. At this rate, by the year 2000 we shall have to emulate the young man in the limerick:

> There was a young fellow called Bright,
> With velocity faster than light,
> Who set out one day
> In a relative way,
> And returned the previous night.

The substance of social science is indeed complex and confusing, but it is a "given," and we can only grin and bear and, if possible, not bore with it. There is, however, a further dimension of rapid change in social science education about which something might be done. I refer to changes in pedagogic fashion.

Teachers who try to keep up with changes in pedagogic fashions must be thoroughly bewildered after the developments of the past two decades. The kaleidoscope is jolted annually. Consider the following switches and changes in objectives and methods for social studies. The list is incomplete, but sufficiently representative.

Way back in the fifties there was socialization, democratic attitudes, citizenship. Then came a demand for more scientific instruction, or conceptual learning. No doubt some of the "new math" rubbed off on social studies. Conceptual learning led fairly logically to the inquiry method, which was variously interpreted. Some experts said that inquiry meant that students should discover everything for themselves; others argued that it meant problem-solving, that is, using concepts and skills to interpret the facts of a given human situation, past or present. At this point someone rediscovered "values," or principles of behavior and judgment, and

SO-011 354

preached the idea of "value clarification," a technique in which each student was expected to work out his or her own value system. Meanwhile Bloom's "Taxonomy" had been popularized, and the battle between cognitive learning and affective learning was on. (That battle had actually been on for 2,500 years, and most teachers managed to coexist with both sides!)

These controversies, especially the values anxiety, coincided with a period of upheaval in Western societies. In the United States the transvaluation of values was complicated by the civil rights revolution and the Vietnam involvement. William Manchester, in his vast survey of recent American history, The Glory and the Dream, wittily summed up the turmoil of youth at the turn of the decade:

> To those on the left side of the divide, the aroused young ideologues, nothing seemed to be sacred: not the American flag, God, motherhood, knowledge, honor, modesty, chastity, or simple honesty. In 1968 insurance actuaries reportedly discovered that the group in society which failed most often to repay its debts was the young collegians who owed tuition loans; a college president wrote to one defaulter who had just graduated, and back came a photograph of the new alumnus naked and in a cave. It was almost possible to believe that for some middle-class youths the Boy Scout pledge which their fathers had recited had become inverted: they strove to be untrustworthy, disloyal, unhelpful, hostile, discourteous, unkind, disobedient, cheerless, wasteful, craven, dirty, and irreverent.
>
> (William Manchester, The Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of America, 1932-1972. Boston: Little, Brown and Co. 1972, 1974, p. 1407.)

We now had a host of additional social science objectives: racial equality and integration, cultural pluralism, multi-ethnicity, and special ethnic studies. Inevitably sexual equality and sexual discrimination also became themes for social studies teachers. Social studies, which have always been the target of special interest groups, became a free-for-all. Special mandated courses were demanded and often imposed. This was the heyday of minicourses, and semester courses to satisfy this group or that group. This trend is still with us.

All these developments were bound up with the prevalence of the conviction that the schools should be instruments of social engineering: that is to say that the schools' main function ought to be the transformation of society. This objective is, perhaps, feasible in totalitarian societies; it

seems to place an impossible burden on schools in a liberal society. One consequence was the imposition in many school districts of a species of judicial dictatorship in education. The resulting conflict of interests and authority in education has not yet been resolved.

Paradoxically, the fashion of social engineering went along with the mass of competing aims that I have just described. Diane S. Ravitch, Professor of History and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, aptly called the period "an Era whose style was anarchic individualism." (Diane S. Ravitch, "Minimum Competency Testing: The Consumer Movement in Education," Journal of the Institution for Socioeconomic Studies, Vol. III, No. 3, Autumn 1978, p. 3.) Anarchic individualism is hardly compatible with social engineering, but the incompatibility may have been a blessing in disguise.

At any rate, the educational situation left social studies teachers relatively free, if appallingly confused. The next phase was an attempt to institutionalize this chaos by rejecting any attempt at scientific objectivity. Permissiveness and standardlessness were justified under the banners of social involvement, emotional or affective instruction, open-ended discussion, and enhancement of the self-concept of students. There were those who claimed that intuition and a species of poetic awareness should replace knowledge as the goal in social studies education.

Meanwhile at least three other developments—or demands—in social science education should be noted. One was the demand for legal education: instruction in law, and in the rights, duties, and obligations of citizens. This was a response to the law and order problem in society, and the painful rise in juvenile crime and delinquency. Another development was the clamor for economic education: instruction in consumerism, in the working of the market, and in the mixed economic system of America. For good measure, a third demand arose for global education: education for a one-world society, involving international politics, international organization, international law, and the history, interrelations, and special features of the world's many cultures and major cultural regions. Nor must we forget the economics of our one world: the gap between developed and less developed nations, the revolution of rising expectations, the world population problem, and the energy crisis! No one can complain that the lot of the social studies teacher was a soft option.

II. The Fashions of the Late 1970s

The catalogue of fashions has brought us up to yesteryear, when a reaction set in, the impact of which is not yet clear. The general public and the politicians began to take notice, and the pedagogic experts made some

adjustments. The two big themes of recent fashion have been (1) "citizenship" as an objective of social studies education and (2) "back to basics" —the latter incorporating emphasis on "skills." At the present time there is little agreement among the pedagogic pundits as to the precise practical meaning of these terms as far as social science education is concerned. For some "citizenship" means understanding the consensual values that support a free society; for others "citizenship" means questioning those values. For some "back to basics" means a return to the memorization of dates and names in history, especially national history, and of places and products in geography; for others it means a return to intellectual rigor and precise conceptual-skill objectives.

The present situation is further complicated by a third popular fashion; that is, the demand for less and less challenging textbooks, with reduced reading levels and problems downgraded to suit the abilities of the lowest achievers in the class. Here the assumption that "basics" means "minimal competency" emerges. It is as if the basics of architecture were reduced to the skills needed to build tarpaper shacks.

Unfortunately (or fortunately!) we cannot go into the minimum competency fashion at this time. The notion is perhaps more important in the fields of reading, writing, and computation than in social science. Diane Ravitch, in the article that I quoted earlier, sums up a major issue in the competency controversy as follows:

> One problem that test-makers are wrestling with is how hard or how easy the tests should be. If they are too hard, then they will not be tests of minimum competence; if they are too easy, then they will do nothing to enhance the value of a degree nor to identify students in need of remediation. About one-third of the 100,000 Florida juniors who took math and literacy examinations last year failed one of the tests, and this result has caused a flurry of remediation classes. New York State recently announced that it was revising its basic competency test for eleventh-graders, after the test was ridiculed in the press as "too easy." It is noteworthy that the "easy" test was passed by 95 percent of suburban/rural eleventh grade students, by 82 percent of large city (excluding New York City) juniors, and by only 63 percent of New York City public school juniors.
>
> (Diane S. Ravitch, op. cit., pages 6-7)

Where will all this complexity and confusion lead? It is more than probable that, long before agreement is achieved, another fashion will be rampant. Who can guess what it will be? Politics may have more to do with the next phase than pedagogy.

It is fairly obvious that busy teachers cannot afford to try to adjust to these kaleidoscopic changes. Most of us try to get on with our job, yet we cannot evade some of the distractions and interferences that cloud the academic atmosphere. Many of us are frustrated not to say bedeviled by the intellectual-emotional turmoil. Can anything be done to clear the atmosphere?

III. Speculations on the Reasons for Changing Fashions

Before we can answer the question, we must try to analyze the reasons for the rapid succession of experiments and changes. Here are some personal reflections.

(1) Undoubtedly the upheaval and transition in American society and in world affairs have influenced education, and especially social science education. These things, as we have seen, are part of the burden of social science teachers. But they are exacerbated by excessive pedagogic changes.

(2) I used to think that the changes originated in Teachers Colleges. A bright and ambitious professor of pedagogy is easily tempted by the opportunity to make a quick reputation by inventing or reinventing a gimmick or fashion in education. Although this temptation is not, in my opinion, the root cause of kaleidoscopic changes in fashion, it does play a role. Teaching is an art, and, in this day and age, artists make their reputations by developing peculiar, idiosyncratic techniques. Parenthetically, let me remark that this trend in education is inimical to the steady improvement of instruction, since it distracts some of our best teachers of teaching from sustained R & D in education. The trend is exaggerated by the bureaucratic interests of governments and private foundations. These interests dictate that funds be allocated for limited, short-term, experimental projects rather than major long-term improvements. Where would industrial research or medical research be today, if R & D in these fields were conducted in the spasmodic, inconsistent way that educational research is done?

(3) Another explanation of the rapid changes in fashion is that teachers and educational administrators encourage successive, unfinished fashions by yearning for devices and methods that will once and for all solve the educational problem. Hence, so the theory goes, there are always thousands of teachers ready to leap on the latest bandwagon as it goes by, tootling its ephemeral Pied Piper tune. This

theory is not borne out by my observations, which suggest that most teachers find their own effective style and method, and tend to stick with the things that they know will work for them and their classes.

Yet there is perhaps a faint justification for blaming the educationists in this matter. I refer to the almost universal custom in schools of refusing to purchase textbooks unless they have a very recent (less than five years old) copyright date. When you consider that in order to have a brand new copyright a book must have ten per cent change in content, you can see that the custom puts a premium on change for the sake of change, not for the sake of improvement.

The situation is rendered worse by the fact that many states—21 in all, I believe—require wholesale new "state adoptions" of textbooks every few years. There is a great deal of profit at stake in these adoptions and in the textbook business in general. Thus the system of textbook adoption across the nation encourages frequent major changes in content of student instructional materials, without regard for quality and improvement.

(4) Indeed, as I look at the educational scene, I am forced to conclude that one of the root causes of the unstable fashions and fads that I described is the competition of the commercial textbook publishers. The competition, by the way, is often phony, in the sense that quality and value for money are seldom the real criteria of production and sales. Factors such as the latest fad, and a powerful sales force, are more important than real quality. It is noteworthy that publishers do not welcome serious, expert evaluation of textbooks and textbook series. One publisher's executive explained why: "If the evaluation is favorable, no one seems to care; but if there is one critical sentence in a review, the other book companies take it out of context and distribute it to textbook selection committees." A sad comment. How would anyone like to volunteer as the Ralph Nader of instructional materials? "Warning: The Pooh Bah of Textbook Evaluation has Determined that Textbooks may be Dangerous to Your Intelligence."

In recent years, if my impressions are correct, the automobile companies have been moving away from the absurd changes in fashion and styling (changes which actually made the cars produced in the same year look alike even though they were produced by competing companies) that dominated the 1950s and '60s. The auto companies also seem today to place less emphasis on planned obsolescence than they used to do. Intrinsic qualities such as good workmanship (I should say workership), value for money, safety, and economy of performance are today more important than the fashion design of the year. The commercial textbook publishers have not kept up with the auto industry. Planned obsolescence is still the name of the textbook

game. Another part of the game is the imitating of successful textbooks published by other companies. There is no such thing as plagiarism in textbooks; the process might be called protective mimicry.

You can now see why there has been little if any general progressive improvement in education in recent years. You can see also why many teachers prefer to use materials other than textbooks if such materials are available and if their students can handle them.

However, for most of the school years, we depend on textbooks, and the power of the publishers is therefore often decisive. This brings me to a further obstacle to long-term improvement in education.

(5) Most educators agree that learning is a gradual, cumulative process. They agree that, for at least the first six or seven and possibly for the first nine years of formal education, consistency and planned reiteration and application of knowledge in gently increasing sophistication is the most efficient technique. Just as a very young child's development is delayed if the people and things surrounding it change frequently, so an older child's intellectual development is hampered by arbitrary variations or interruptions in instruction. Our system, however, does not permit one teacher to stay with the same group of youngsters for several years. This limitation is probably desirable for a number of reasons. However, there is a way of providing consistency and continuity for the youngsters. That way is by providing instructional materials that are carefully designed for that purpose.

But notice: an eight- or nine-year sequence of instructional materials that are truly consistent and cumulative cannot be put together in a couple of years. It certainly cannot be tested and improved in less than eight or ten years. However, if radical changes and new formats have to be made every five years, the possibility of developing effective educational materials is inhibited. It takes three to four years to write, edit, modify, typeset, proofread, illustrate, print, bind, and distribute a textbook. The technique generally used to produce a textbook series is to assemble committees of editors, consultants, market research experts, and writers, and to have separate writers or teams of writers for each book. Small wonder if the resulting series is inconsistent and confusing. But who is to know just how inconsistent and confusing the series is? Not the teachers, who use only one year of the series. Not the adoption committees, because no one can grasp the real effectiveness of a six- or nine-year curriculum by skimming eighteen or more books for pupils and teachers together with all ancillary materials. Who then? The students are the only ones who can know, and they do not have

the critical experience necessary; and even if they did have critical abilities, what could they do?

(6) One might expect that the five-year revision of a textbook series in order to provide a fresh up-to-date copyright would enable important improvements in cumulative, consistent instruction to be made. Alas, most revisions are not based on research and development. They are dictated by the prevailing fads or fashions and by protective mimicry of the best selling textbooks. All too often the revision is the work of the publisher's editors, guided by the publisher's market research staff. In the revision even of a high school textbook, the authors whose names appear on the title page may have had no opportunity to rewrite or update a single sentence. Thus a recently revised textbook may be completely out-of-date in its factual or scholarly content, but it will include a ten per cent change to justify a fresh copyright, and the changes will make a token gesture toward prevailing pedagogic fashion as interpreted by the publisher's market research staff.

IV. Can We Break the Tyranny of Fashion?

Doubtless there are other causes of the fluctuating fashions in education and in social studies education especially. Some teachers doubtless think that frequent changes and experiments are desirable. Indeed, changes and experiments are essential, but they should be directed to the goal of improved education. The tragedy of the changes of fashion which we have been considering is that they prevent progress. Persistent R & D directed toward a clear objective involves many experiments and trials and errors, but each experiment contributes to the attainment of the objective. Imagine how far space exploration would have reached had the space scientists changed their aims and methods radically five or six times in a decade. That, however, is precisely what happens in education. Nothing is ever followed to a conclusion; no problem is ever worked out. And we wonder why student achievement is declining.

Which brings us back to the problem: Can anything be done to remedy the situation? In my analysis I perhaps laid too much stress on the economic factor of the textbook industry. In a market system the producers offer what the consumers want, and the textbook publishers assume that, since we buy textbooks based on passing fads and fashions and since we demand new copyrights every five years, they (the publishers) are satisfying the market demand. If the consumers—the teachers and adoption committees—demanded something better, the publishers would provide an improved product.

The responsibility ultimately is ours as the practitioners of education. If we demand more effective curriculum and more effective instructional tools, we can obtain them. If we insist that the steady improvement of basic, cumulative education is more important than successive experimental fads or brand new copyrights, we shall get steady improvement. If we recognize that education should be student-centered, and that the student exists in time and therefore requires instruction that is consistent and cumulative, we shall find that consistent, cumulative programs of instruction will be available.

That, I confess, is the conclusion to which my 20-year observation of and participation in the educational scene has led me. We are professionals; we have a commitment to professional ideals; we should demand the tools that we require to do our work, and the sustained research and development necessary to improve those tools. Perhaps we shall obtain a moratorium on fads and fashions in education, but that may be an impossible dream.

NOTES ON THE PAPER

1. The paper is the substance of a speech given by the Director of the Social Science Program of ERCA to the Social Studies section of the North East Ohio Teachers Association, October 13, 1978.

2. Because of the nature of the occasion, the paper does not make the point which regular readers of <u>you, too</u> will recognize, that is, that the ERCA Social Science Program aims at the sustained R & D which is absent from most commercially produced social studies texts. Even in the case of the ERCA program, it is difficult to resist the pressures of fads and fashions, and the demands of the market-research experts.

3. In the course of discussion one participant underlined with some bitterness the point that superficial and faddish changes are in fact the enemies of real, fundamental improvement in education. They are clever devices to defend blind, reactionary interests. The same point applies to other fields. Changing fashions in automobiles, for example, prevent the development of real, revolutionary improvements in transportation.

4. Not mentioned among the possible reasons for the lack of sustained improvement in social science education is the idea, which doubtless occurs to readers, that a number of interests in our society are tacitly allied in opposition to such improvement. Many people, for various

motives, do not want more intelligent, knowledgeable, rational citizens. This is understandable, but it is probably suicidal. It is an attitude that, in the past, has contributed to the failure and collapse of advanced, democratically governed societies. What we don't know can hurt us—very badly.